

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. An entity for securely storing a value indicative of funds available for use, comprising;

a first storage for storing said value;

an externally readable identifier within said entity for providing a unique identification of said entity;

a second storage in said entity for storing information assigning said entity to operate in an application; and

communications for changing said information so as to assign said entity to a new application.

2. The entity of claim 1, wherein said identifier is digital data.

3. The entity of claim 1 wherein said identifier is a character string.

4. The entity of claim 2, further comprising circuitry, wherein said digital data is stored on said circuitry.

5. The entity of claim 1, in combination with an adapter for connecting to said entity, said adapter comprising:

an electrical connector for electrically connecting to said entity, and

an interface for supporting communication between said entity and an external system, so that said entity can be identified by said external system by reading said identifier.

6. The entity of claim 5, wherein said interface supports communication with at least one protocol selected from the group consisting of RS-232; IEEE 488; USB; TCP/IP; SCSI; Infrared; RF; net appliance protocol; and personal computer bus protocols.

7. The entity of claim 1, configured as a virtual entity on a computer.

8. The entity of claim 1, configured so as to be useful as a postal funds security device.

9. The entity of claim 8, configured to be used in a closed postal system device, wherein the printing function is integral to the device.

10. The entity of claim 8, configured to be used in an open postal system device, wherein the printing function is external to the device.

11. The entity of claim 1, embodied in the form of an apparatus, further comprising a human readable identifier corresponding to said internally stored identifier, said human readable identifier being displayed externally on said apparatus.

12. The entity of claim 1, embodied in the form of an apparatus, further comprising externally visible indicia on said apparatus, said indicia corresponding to said internally stored identifier.

13. The entity of claim 12, wherein said externally visible indicia comprises at least one of a bar code and a serial number.

14. A method for allocating use of an entity for securely storing a value indicative of funds available for use; said entity having an externally readable identifier within said entity for providing a unique identification of said entity, said method comprising:

19. The method of claim 15, wherein said entity is embodied in a device, further comprising establishing communication between said device and a system external to said device.

20. The method of claim 19, further comprising identifying said device by reading said identifier.

21. The method of claim 20, further comprising:

connecting said device to an adapter, said adapter comprising an electrical connector for electrically connecting to said device, and an interface for supporting communication between said device and an external system, and

identifying said device with said external system by said external system reading said identifier.

22. The method of claim 21, wherein communication is established with at least one protocol selected from the group consisting of RS-232; IEEE 488; USB; TCP/IP; SCSI; infrared; optical; RF; net appliance protocol; and personal computer bus protocols.

23. The method of claim 15, wherein said entity is configured as a virtual entity on a computer.

24. The method of claim 15, wherein said entity is configured so as to be useful as a postal funds security device.

25. The method of claim 24, wherein said entity is configured to be used in a closed postal system.

26. The method of claim 24, wherein said device is configured to be used in an open postal system.

28. The method of claim 15, wherein said entity is embodied in the form of a device, further comprising placing externally visible indicia on said device, said indicia corresponding to said internally stored identifier.

30. The method of claim 15, further comprising reallocating said entity by repeating steps a) and b) for a different application.

32. The method of claim 31, further comprising authorizing said reallocation using a secure authorization step.

34. An adapter for connecting to a device for securely storing a value indicative of funds available for use, said device having at least one register for storing said

value; and an externally readable identifier within said device for providing a unique identification of said device, said adapter comprising:

an electrical connector for electrically connecting to said device, and

an interface for supporting communication between said device and an external system, so that said device can be identified by said external system by reading said identifier.

35. The adapter of claim 34, wherein said interface supports additional communication between said external system and said device so as to reconfigure said device for a new application of said device.

36. The adapter of claim 34, wherein said interface supports additional communication between said external system and said device so as to enable adding value to said register.

37. A method for adding value to a device for the secure storage of value corresponding to funds to be expended, said device being located in a first location, said method comprising:

moving said device to a second location where communications with a remote system which acts as a source of said value of funds can be established;

placing said device in an adapter having an interface suitable for facilitating communication between said device and said remote location; and

authorizing a value transfer to said device.

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38. The method of claim 37, further comprising authorizing operation of said device when said device has been moved to said second location.